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The opinion in support of the decision being entered today was not written for publication and is not binding precedent of the Board.

Paper No. 29

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

BEFORE THE BOARD OF PATENT APPEALS
AND INTERFERENCES

Ex parte MICHAEL C. SCOGGIE, MICHAEL E. KACABA,
DAVID A. ROCHON and DAVID M. DIAMOND

Appeal No. 2004-0989
Application No. 09/401,939

ON BRIEF



Before KRASS, JERRY SMITH and FLEMING, Administrative Patent Judges.

KRASS, Administrative Patent Judge.

DECISION ON APPEAL

This is a decision on appeal from the final rejection of claims 32-70.

The invention is directed to providing shopping aids and incentives to customers through a computer network. In particular, purchasing incentives are distributed to a consumer by transmitting promotion data identifying a plurality of product

discounts from a main computer to the consumer's computer and displaying the plurality of product discounts at the consumer's computer based on the promotion data. Selection data designating at least one product discount selected from the plurality of product discounts is then transmitted from the consumer's computer to the main computer.

Representative independent claim 32 is reproduced as follows:

32. A computer implemented method for distributing purchasing incentives to consumers, comprising:

transmitting promotion data identifying a plurality of product discounts from a main computer to a personal computer over a computer network;

displaying said plurality of product discounts at said personal computer based on said promotion data;

transmitting selection data designating at least one product discount selected from said plurality of product discounts from said personal computer to said main computer over said computer network;

generating token data depending on said selection data;

transmitting said token data from said main computer to said personal computer over said computer network;

identifying said token data in a retail store in association with items being purchased at said retail store;

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determining discount items being purchased corresponding to said at least one product discount from said identified token data; and

generating a purchase incentive based on said discount items.

The examiner relies on the following references:

Day et al. (Day) 5,857,175 Jan. 5, 1999

Scroggie et al. (Scroggie) 5,970,469 Oct. 19, 1999
(filed Mar. 26, 1996)

Claims 32-70 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, first and second paragraphs, as relying on a disclosure lacking enablement and a written description, and as being vague and indefinite.

Claims 32-70 stand further rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as anticipated by Day.

Claims 32-70 stand further rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 as "an obvious variation of examiner's personal knowledge of consumer purchasing incentive distribution provided by PerformanceBike" (answer-page 5).

Claims 32-70 stand still further rejected under obviousness-type double patenting over claims 1-3 of U.S. Patent No. 5,970,469 to Scroggie.

Claims 32-70 stand even still further rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 "over copending US Patent Application 09/567,274" (answer-page 8).¹

Reference is made to the briefs and answer for the respective positions of appellants and the examiner.

OPINION

We turn, first, to the rejection of claims 32-70 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, first paragraph.

The examiner contends that the claimed steps of transmitting selection data designating at least one product discount selected from a plurality of product discounts from a personal computer to a main computer over a computer network and generating token data depending on selection data are "not enabled by the specification." The examiner also contends that the inventors did not have possession of the claimed invention at the time of filing because the specification does not discuss transmitting selection data designating at least one product discount selected from a plurality of product discounts from a personal computer to

¹While the examiner indicates the rejection is based on "prior art" in stating that the rejection is under "35 U.S.C. § 103, it is clear from the examiner's explanation, especially, at the bottom of page 15 in the answer, that the rejection is really a provisional rejection based on obviousness-type double patenting.

a main computer over a computer network and generating token data depending on selection data.

It is the examiner's position that these claimed features are not enabled by the instant specification since the "examiner considers them to be concepts that cannot be practically applied to any embodiment of the invention" such that skilled artisans could make and use the invention.

The examiner's position regarding the rejection of the claims under 35 U.S.C. § 112, first paragraph, is unreasonable and we will not sustain these rejections.

As a matter of Patent and Trademark Office practice, a specification disclosure which contains a teaching of the manner and process of making and using the invention in terms which correspond in scope to those used in describing and defining the subject matter sought to be patented *must* be taken as in compliance with the enabling requirement of the first paragraph of 35 U.S.C. 112 unless there is reason to doubt the objective truth of the statements contained therein which must be relied on for enabling support. Assuming that sufficient reason for such doubt does exist, a rejection for failure to teach how to make and/or use will be proper on that basis; such a rejection can be overcome by suitable proofs indicating that the teaching

contained in the specification is truly enabling, In re Marzucchi, 439 F.2d 220, 169 USPQ 367 (CCPA 1971); In re Sichert, 566 F.2d 1154, 196 USPQ 209 (CCPA 1977).

When a rejection is made on the basis that the disclosure lacks enablement, it is incumbent upon the examiner to explain why he doubts the truth or accuracy of any statement in a supporting disclosure and to back up assertions with acceptable evidence or reasoning which is inconsistent with the contested statement. The examiner has not advanced any such evidence or an acceptable line of reasoning inconsistent with enablement and, therefore, has not sustained his burden.

Not only has the examiner not set forth any reasonable basis for challenging the sufficiency of disclosure, asserting, without explanation, that he deems the claimed features to be merely "concepts that cannot be practically applied" (answer-page 4), but it appears to us that the claimed features of "transmitting selection data designating at least one product discount selected from a plurality of product discounts from a personal computer to a main computer over said computer network" and "generating token data depending on said selection data" merely entail programming web sites to provide the functionality claimed. This functionality of transmitting data selected from a plurality of

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choices and generating other data in dependence on the selection data does not appear to us to be anything out of the ordinary for the skilled web programmer and would not entail any undue experimentation on his/her part.

Accordingly, we will not sustain the rejection of claims 32-70 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, first paragraph, based on non-enablement.

With regard to written description, we also will not sustain the rejection of claims 32-70 on this ground.

The examiner again points to the claim language, "transmitting selection data designating at least one product discount selected from a plurality of product discounts from a personal computer to a main computer over said computer network" and "generating token data depending on said selection data" and, now, alleges that since the specification does not discuss these claimed features, it is not considered that the applicants had possession of what they now claim as their invention at the time of filing the instant application.

Appellants point to page 9, lines 4-5, of the instant specification for a disclosure of a customer selecting a coupon offer from a plurality of offers after log-in and switching to an offer browser.

With regard to "generating token data...," appellants point to page 24, lines 2-6, of the specification. Since this portion of the specification states that

Generating a "token" instead of coupon, as described above with reference to FIG. 13, also reduces the risk of fraud. Another technique similar to this is depicted in FIG. 18. A token 316 is generated by the user's computer 302 after interaction with the distribution sever 300. The user chooses from incentive offers as described above, but instead of a coupon the computer 302 generates the token 316,

it is clear to us that applicants did, indeed, have possession of the invention which they now claim.

Thus, we will not sustain the rejection of claims 32-70 under the written description clause of 35 U.S.C. § 112, first paragraph.

Turning to the rejection of the claims under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, the examiner alleges that the claims are indefinite because there is no antecedent basis for "transmitting selected data" or "generating token data" in the claimed steps of transmitting selection data designating at least one product discount selected from a plurality of product discounts from a personal computer to a main computer over said computer network and generating token data depending on said selection data. The examiner also alleges that the instant specification also does

not provide an antecedent basis for these claim limitations.

First, we point out that the second paragraph of 35 U.S.C. § 112 is directed to the claims, not the specification. We may look to the specification to give meaning to an otherwise misunderstood claim limitation but the claims themselves must provide the antecedent basis for the specific claimed steps/elements.

Moreover, the inquiry under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, is whether the claims do, in fact, set out and circumscribe a particular area with a reasonable degree of precision and particularity. It is here where the definiteness of the language employed must be analyzed—not in a vacuum, but always in light of the teachings of the prior art and of the particular application disclosure as it would be interpreted by one possessing the ordinary skill in the pertinent art. In re Moore, 439 F.2d 1232, 1235, 169 USPQ 236, 238 (CCPA 1971).

In the instant case, taking claim 32 as exemplary, the steps of "transmitting selection data..." and "generating a token data..." are first time recitations within the claim and the recited steps themselves provide the antecedent basis for the steps. Thus, the examiner's concern for "antecedent basis" is not understood. It is not as if the claims recited "said step of

transmitting selection data..." and never previously recited such data.

Accordingly, we find that the examiner's rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, has no basis, in fact. The claims do set out and circumscribe a particular area with a reasonable degree of precision and particularity and, as such, are in accordance with 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph. The examiner has failed to reasonably show any indefiniteness within the claims.

Thus, we will not sustain the rejection of claims 32-70 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph.

The examiner's next rejection deals with anticipation of the claims under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) over Day.

A claim is anticipated only when a single prior art reference expressly or inherently discloses each and every element or step thereof. Constant v. Advanced Micro-Devices Inc., 848 F.2d 1560, 7 USPQ2d 1057 (Fed. Cir. 1988); RCA Corp. v. Applied Digital Data Systems, Inc., 730 F.2d 1440, 221 USPQ 385 (Fed. Cir. 1984). If the examiner presents a reasonable basis for alleging inherency, the burden shifts to appellant to come forward, if they can, with evidence to the contrary. In re King, 801 F.2d 1324, 231 USPQ 136 (Fed. Cir. 1986); In re Ludtke, 441

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F.2d 660, 169 USPQ 563 (CCPA 1971); In re Swinehart, 439 F.2d 210, 169 USPQ 226 (CCPA 1971).

It is the examiner's position that claims 32-70 are "clearly anticipated" by Day, without any explanation in the statement of the rejection at page 5 of the answer.

In response to appellants' arguments, the examiner explains his position, at pages 11-14 of the answer. That position is that column 1, line 64 through column 2, line 5, and column 3, line 20, anticipates all of the claimed subject matter with regard to the independent claims.

The examiner basically relies on the background section of Day, wherein is described an in-store terminal which a consumer may access. A list of coupons is presented to the consumer, and a link between the terminal and check-out stations in the store permits discounts selected by the consumer to be subtracted from the total bill on check-out.

We would agree that, given the broadest, reasonable interpretation of "personal computer," "computer network" and "main computer," one might consider the in-store terminal described in Day as a "personal computer" since it is used by the consumer. One may even consider the link between the terminal and the check-out stations to be part of a "computer network."

Possibly, the main check-out stations might constitute the claimed "main computer."

However, it is not clear from the description in Day, or from the examiner's explanation, that the main computers (i.e., the main check-out stations) are actually transferring the promotion data to the personal computer (i.e., the consumer terminals). The instant claims require the main computer to transfer promotion data identifying a plurality of product discounts to a personal computer over a computer network.

But, even if we assume that the check-out stations described in the cited portions of Day do, in fact, transmit the promotion data to the customer terminal and even if we assume, then, that Day would teach the claimed steps of "transmitting promotion data...," "displaying said plurality of product discounts..." and "transmitting selection data...," the examiner's case would still fail because the instant claims all require an element/step of "generating token data depending on said selection data."

The examiner's rationale is that this generation of token data is "considered an implicit patentable equivalent to the disclosed discounts subtracted from a consumer's total bill wherein the claimed token data functionality is met by the

disclosed discount subtraction" (answer-page 12), referring to lines 3-4 of column 2 in Day.

The cited portion of Day refers to "discounts selected by the consumer." This may be equivalent to the claimed "...at least one product discount selected..." in the "transmitting selection data..." paragraph of claim 32, for example. But, this cited portion of Day cannot then also serve as disclosing the next claimed step of "generating token data depending on said selection data" because it is only after the selection is made that a token, depending on said selection data, can be generated.

Moreover, we do not see how the generation of such token data can be "implicit" as urged by the examiner.

The examiner has pointed to nothing in the Day disclosure which even suggests the claimed generation of "token data." Without a teaching of this token data, Day cannot identify any such token data or determine discount items being purchased from undisclosed token data.

Accordingly, since the examiner's rationale fails to convincingly point, in the applied reference, to the claimed "token data," the examiner has failed to establish a prima facie case of anticipation and we will not sustain the rejection of claims 32-70 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b).

We do point out, in passing, however, that should the examiner have convinced us of a teaching of such "token data" in Day, appellants' arguments would have been insufficient to overcome such a prima facie case since appellants merely argue that Day does not disclose what is recited in the claims, without specifically pointing out any perceived errors in the examiner's position, and without specifically identifying particular claimed features which are considered to distinguish over Day.

Nevertheless, since the burden to establish a prima facie case of anticipation rests initially on the examiner, and, in our view, the examiner clearly failed to meet that burden in this case, we do not reach appellants' arguments.

The examiner's next rejection, under 35 U.S.C. § 103, is based on "an obvious variation of examiner's personal knowledge of consumer purchasing incentive distribution provided by PerformanceBike."

The examiner contends that since "at least 1994, PerformanceBike has performed the claimed method, system and program..." The examiner states that he

has personal knowledge of instant or subsequent redeemable vouchers, separate shopping lists based on selected product discounts, main to personal computer shopping list transmission, specific manufacturer or specific retailer discounts, demographic data or token

use or product use frequency basis, and internet/intranet token scanning identification. The claimed promotion data transmission and product discount display occur when the examiner went into a PerformanceBike retail outlet store and viewed discounted products from a sales catalog. The selection data transmission occurs when the examiner uses the red courtesy phone (functionally equivalent to a claimed personal computer) and calls the retail outlet distribution center (functionally equivalent to the claimed main computer). The generating, transmitting, and identifying token data occurs when examiner's frequent buyer card bar code number is processed for the product selection data made from the red courtesy phone (examiner's frequent buyer card bar code number is the same as the claimed token data). The step of determining discount items being purchased occurs when the retail outlet distribution center verifies the final purchase order of the examiner. Generating purchase incentive based on discount items occurs when the examiner is credited with frequent buyer points rewarded for discount item purchased... The claimed invention...has been provided by PerformanceBike long before the filing of applicants' invention. Examiner takes Official notice that it is old and well known...to claim the invention as recited by the applicant by substituting terms with patentably equivalent claim language, in order to overcome the explicit teachings of the examiner's experienced prior art. Furthermore examiner experience teaches the claimed invention except for the personal computer display. It would have been obvious...to provide a personal computer display since the computer display is merely an automated feature of a concept that is old and well known... It is considered that the claim recitations using "computer" are an attempt to automate an old and well known process provided by PerformanceBike... (answer-pages 6-7).

Appellants argue, at pages 15-20 of the principal brief, that the PerformanceBike website has not been established as

prior art and the examiner has offered no physical evidence to support the examiner's assertions.

We have considered the examiner's assertions and appellants' arguments thereagainst and we conclude that the examiner has simply not established that his experience with PerformanceBike would constitute a prima facie case of obviousness against the instant claimed subject matter. Without physical evidence and/or a more detailed written description as to how the PerformanceBike retail system works, we are not persuaded by the examiner's declaration of experience that the frequent buyer card bar code number would read on the generating, transmitting and identifying steps in paragraphs 5-7, for example, of claim 32, or that a red courtesy phone may be considered the claimed "personal computer." We are also not convinced that the claimed transmitting promotion data would be met by merely walking into a PerformanceBike retail store so that the information is "transmitted" to the consumer.

Since the examiner's experience is not convincing as to obviousness of the instant claimed subject matter, we will not sustain the rejection of claims 32-70 under 35 U.S.C. § 103 based on the examiner's experience with PerformanceBike.

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The examiner also rejected claims 32-70 under obviousness-type double patenting over claims 1-3 of U.S. Patent No. 5,970,469.

As the examiner explained, at page 8 of the answer, while the claims are not identical, they are not patentably distinct from each other because "the patented feature of encoded data is an obvious variation of the application claimed token and because both perform the same function in the same manner with the same result."

It is our view that the examiner makes at least a reasonable case since the "token" of the instant claims does appear to be similar to the patented "purchasing incentive containing in encoded form the identity of the retailer designated by the customer..." In the face of this rather reasonable finding of obvious-type double patenting, appellants' sole argument is that the patented claims

define transmitting purchase incentives associated with recipes, whereas the present claims define identifying token data in a retail store for generating purchase incentives. One would not have been obvious in view of the other (principal brief-page 22).

Thus, appellants merely assert that the instant claims would not have been obvious over the patented claims but do not point to any error in the examiner's reasoning. It is not enough to

argue that the instant claims define identifying token data in a retail store when the patented claims are also clearly directed to generating purchase incentives for a retail store. Appellants have offered nothing to show any non-obviousness difference between the claimed "token" and the encoded purchasing incentive, while the examiner has made out a reasonable case that one would have been obvious over the other.

Accordingly, we will sustain the rejection of claims 32-70 over obviousness-type double patenting over claims 1-3 of U.S. Patent No. 5,970,469.

Finally, we turn to the examiner's rejection of the claims "under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious over copending US Patent Application 09/567,274," which, as explained supra, is really a provisional rejection based on obviousness-type double patenting.

It appears to be the examiner's position that the difference between the instant claims and the claims in the copending application is in the recitation, by the latter, of the generation of redeemable vouchers, separate shopping list transmission, etc. and that the instant claims would have been obvious thereover, especially since the instant claims appear to be broader in scope.

The examiner's position does not appear to be unreasonable. Yet, appellants do not dispute the merits of the rejection. Instead, they argue only that the copending application is not prior art because it "appears from the PTO website to be unpublished" (principal brief-page 24). Appellants appear to be responding to a rejection thought to be under 35 U.S.C. § 103. However, the examiner made it clear, in the response section of the answer, that this rejection was really a provisional obviousness-type double patenting rejection. In filing a reply brief, appellants had an opportunity to respond to this rejection but, for whatever reason, chose not to do so. Thus, in effect, we have no response from appellants with regard to the rejection.

If the copending application has been, or will be, abandoned, then this rejection becomes moot. However, if the copending application remains pending with the claim language identified by the examiner, then this "provisional" rejection appears to us to be proper.

Accordingly, we will sustain this provisional rejection of claims 32-70 over copending application Serial No. 09/567,274, based on obviousness-type double patenting, as appellants have convinced us of no error in the examiner's position.

Rejections which were previously made by the examiner but not repeated in the answer are not before us. Accordingly, contrary to appellants' request, we will not treat such rejections.

CONCLUSION

We have not sustained the rejection of claims 32-70 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, first and second paragraphs. We also have not sustained the rejection of claims 32-70 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) or under 35 U.S.C. § 103 based on an obvious variation of the examiner's personal knowledge of incentives by PerformanceBike.

We have, however, sustained the rejection of claims 32-70 based on obviousness-type double patenting over claims 1-3 of U.S. Patent No. 5,970,469, and over claims of copending application Serial No. 09/567,274.

Therefore, the examiner's decision is affirmed.

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No time period for taking any subsequent action in connection with this appeal may be extended under 37 CFR § 1.136(a).

AFFIRMED

Errol A. Krass

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